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Future Visions of Policing

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as I said in a nut shell for me what is that about? Police officers who build relationships with all aspects of the community, who take ownership for that community and who are prepared to demonstrate the commitment to work with that person from start to finish to ensure that they walk away from their contact with the police satisfied and with an increased sense of confidence in terms of how they have been dealt with. It is ultimately about trying to make Northern Ireland safer and more peaceful. We can't do that on our own.

We have had burglaries over recent days in terms of older people which have been horrendous and rightly so the media has been very much focused on what is going on. But you know what? We always put out an appeal, it is part of our training in terms of dealing with the media, we need the community's help. But do you know what? It is much more than just a mantra. We cannot bring people who commit those sorts of crimes to justice unless we get the help and that is my challenge that I will leave you with.

In terms of delivering policing with the community, there are two sides to this equation. We need the help of the community. We need the community to engage. We need to facilitate that, I fully accept, but we need the community as a whole to play their part because policing is too old a game for anybody to be naively thinking we can do this on our own. We can't. We absolutely need the community to do this with us. So my challenge is in terms of the next ten years how we actually make this partnership much more equal and much more productive. Thanks very much.

MIKE RITCHIE

Thanks very much, Nigel. Our final speaker before the important people get to have their say, i.e. yourselves, is John Topping. He is a lecturer in criminology at the University of Ulster where he is also research coordinator for the newly formed Centre for Policing Studies. His PhD, on the delivery of 'Policing with the Community', has involved extensive research with the PSNI, policing bodies and community organisations in both loyalist and republican areas over the past three years. He also acts as a consultant for the training branch of PSNI in the design and delivery of neighbourhood officer training - which has involved the groundbreaking inclusion of community input as part of this training design. John, the floor is yours.

JOHN TOPPING

Centre for Policing Studies, University of Ulster

Thank you. I suppose, just to start, some of the things I say may be at variance with Nigel, but hopefully we can all be friends afterwards.

I want to open just to say thanks to Mike and Mick at the CAJ for inviting me. I think it has been quite an insightful couple of days here in exploring policing with the community and certainly I am a bit daunted to shore up proceedings here but hopefully I will do my best over the next twenty minutes.

In terms of what I am actually going to talk about over the next while is not designed to be, if you like, an easy critique of, an academic critique of policing with the community per se, but rather it is designed to be, if you like, an as I have seen it, an overview of some of the key issues and difficulties for the delivery of policing with the community in the country as part of my research and consultancy with the PSNI, with the Policing Board, the DPPs and at community level over the past three years or so. In this regard, these issues should be taken as a reference point from which the PSNI and the community can take a step back, assess where we are after ten years of policing with the community under Patten and decide where we need to go and, importantly, how to actually get there in terms of a vision for policing with the community into the future.

I know certainly within some quarters of the PSNI, some of my views might be what ACC Finlay described yesterday as 'prickly,' but I think as part of a fresh look at policing with the community, we

need to be honest about the difficulties and go forward with, I suppose, affirmative action to take us, as a society and a community as a whole on our policing with the community journey.

It was Seamus Mallon of the SDLP who, I suppose in the aftermath of the Patten Report, stated that for the first time in the Northern Irish state that the foundations for an answer to the policing question, if you like, had finally been laid. Indeed with the issue of policing, I suppose, having acted as really method bargaining as to the very nature of the conflict over the years, the important and enormous task given to the Patten Commissioners might be set in context.

But without raking over the coals of history, as Maurice Hayes said much more eloquently yesterday, Patten's broad task was essentially about giving policing back to the people of Northern Ireland, to reconnect, if you like, the police with the entire community and more broadly to resolve an issue which for many people had been at the heart of the conflict. Really Patten was part of a consensus, I suppose, that if policing could somehow be got right, whatever that might look like, all the other pieces of the jigsaw would fall into place. Indeed, we are still considering this issue in terms of the devolution of policing and justice at present.

However, the purpose of this talk is not to provide an analysis of the reforms per se, but rather I want to examine the current state of policing in Northern Ireland and specifically Patten 44 on the policing with the community as a central tenet to those reforms and how we can take that forward. I know Clifford Shearing, one of the Patten Commissioner's own words, that vision of policing more broadly conceived.

I think one of the first places to start in terms of policing with the community is how the PSNI has actually adapted to a more community oriented vision of policing and I suppose at least to contextualise this issue in terms of the PSNI moving towards a community policing model is a fact that I suppose the relative peace in which we now all live has actually constituted a crisis with neither, I suppose, the PSNI nor the community entirely sure as to exactly what is to be expected of a more normal policing landscape.

However, I think for my own view it is safe to say that within the PSNI, there has been a distinct lack of focus and clarity regarding the definition and implementation of Patten's core policing with the community vision. Beyond general policies, aspirations relating to community policing, there is presently a broad consensus within the ranks of PSNI as to the absence of any corporate identity or leadership to guide the service on its community policing mission.

While certainly there are good neighbourhood officers on the ground, as there are, many are well aware of what community policing is and what does more generally throughout the organisation this very thick amorphous ideal of policing with the community under Patten has refracted into, I suppose, a variety of piecemeal policies, practices and initiatives in isolated pockets which have certainly amounted to something short of the core function of the entire service.

On the one hand, I think this begs the question of how much longer can the PSNI claim to be a service underpinned by a community policing ethos, or at least I suppose, as Nigel said, to admit to tell us it has failed but they have made that admission, especially when only a tiny fraction of the officers in the PSNI undertake what might broadly be determined as 'community policing.' Indeed I think hard questions have to be asked in terms of pushing policing with the community beyond this nebulous level towards a firm and tangible product delivered on the front line by more than a few dedicated officers. At least our new Chief Constable has begun to ask those questions in terms of freeing up officers from back office duties, although with one of the highest police population ratios in the western world, I think more fundamental restructuring issues of officers in the PSNI need to be asked as well.

On the other hand, serious efforts also need to be made at an organisational level and within the Policing Board to bridge this gap between what PSNI actually do and what the community understand as community policing at the local level. With policing with the community policy having, I suppose, lain dormant now for almost seven years, there needs to be proper consideration of not only how policy is made but how that can be practically translated into policing on the ground. Indeed, certainly the recent efforts at relaunching the policing with the community policy, originally drawn up by Peter Sheridan, astonishingly omitted the key element of problem solving, a vital aspect under, for example, the national reassurance policing programme under the Home Office, I think, really demonstrating how much of a paper exercise it has been rather than a serious attempt at practically defining policing with the community the latest efforts have been. Also as well from what I -- ignoring the advice of the committee actually set up to relaunch that strategy is never a good premise for going forward.

I think what might be termed then, I suppose, we have alluded to, institutional inertia within the PSNI around policing with the community is down to the fact that nobody has taken serious charge of policing with the community since Patten. In many ways, community policing has become, if you like, a cottage industry within PSNI in terms of we have a policing with the community branch, community safety teams, neighbour policing teams, neighbourhood policing models with the Policing Board and now this idea of personal policing under the new Chief Constable. So is it any wonder that there is little coherence to policing with the community in PSNI or, indeed, an understanding of what that might look like on the ground? So I think clarity and simplicity must be vital elements to our vision of policing with the community for the future to benefit both PSNI and the communities.

I think that another vital element for PSNI in terms of a successful future vision of policing with the community is that of engagement with the community. While much attention, time and effort has been devoted within PSNI and the Policing Board to engaging with communities, whether loyalist, republican, ethnic minority, LGBT, little attention, if any, has actually been paid to how policing with the community should be used as a tool through which to engage with the vibrant civil society energy and structures which exist in Northern Ireland; because no matter how many times the policing with the community policy is rewritten, it will always fail when it simply implanted upon that which already exists in terms of local community structures and organising. As recognised again by Clifford Shearing, one of the Patten Commissioners, for example, and also in the final report of the office of the Oversight Commissioner, the strength of civil society in the country and specifically those groups and bodies concerned with broad policing issues -- I use that in its widest sense -- is not only a unique feature of the post conflict landscape, but a necessary feature of the broader policing landscape which has to be embraced as I see it under policing with the community. Indeed, it has been reiterated many times over the past two days that policing is too important for the police.

Beyond the easy and narrow assumptions of paramilitary violence, paramilitary policing, I mean as I have argued elsewhere, there is a vast array of well intentioned community based groups and organisations who actively contribute to policing in the community and who are ready to jump on board with what could be an exciting experiment in civic inclusion in policing matters, and across a range of areas including first line response, education, intervention, mediation, public order containment, parading, interface violence, restorative justice and environmental issues but to name a few, all of these groups and officers on the ground as well who I have spoken to will tell you that the ability of the PSNI to deal with crime in the community would be significantly attenuated if it were not for such non police contributions. I have to pay particular regard to models such as the Upper Springfield Safer Neighbourhood Forum in west Belfast as a shining example of how that can actually work.

So in this regard, community policing as a potential tool for the police to adapt and engage to the community's needs must be fully open to such influences on the ground, and indeed engaging with communities through their own civic channels and on their terms can only be preferable to the current

police led notion of what community policing is, involving the PSNI telling communities what they will get, but not only that, that they will like it.

Really, until a bit more of a progressive vision, as I see it, can be embraced by the PSNI, they will continue to fail to see the connection between community policing and community based security governance as part of a wider public good in Northern Ireland or what I would have otherwise termed 'community governance policing.' So I think again openness and willingness within PSNI to move out of what I suppose has been a bit of a comfort zone in our post Patten engagement status quo is vital for truly inclusive policing with the community.

So what then about our relative normality to policing in Northern Ireland? Indeed policing with the community has always been about and fundamental to our bigger, I suppose, policing end game. But as the former ACC Peter Sheridan recently stated himself in an interview in the Irish News, it is only now, after ten years of post Patten policing, that we are ready as a police service and in communities as a society to move beyond the physical reforms of Patten and begin our policing with the community journey. So I think it is important at this point to look beyond some of the more superficial issues such as record confidence levels in PSNI, record lows in crime rates and all party support of policing is part of this normal picture, because what we actually find ten years on is a police service struggling beneath the pressure and expectation of a community orientated service which, in the community's eyes, never was. Certainly, there are studies indicating that within large loyalist unionist areas there are now record lows in support for PSNI and within republican nationalist areas there is a consensus that the PSNI have simply failed to live up to that which was expected of them when Sinn Féin signed up in 2007. On the one hand, I think it is actually disingenuous to the people of Northern Ireland for the Policing Board to claim there is record confidence and then refuse to carry out localised DCU satisfaction surveys because of financial constraints, as they would term it.

On the other hand, as I recently raised at an international conference, the rising levels in paramilitarism and, more worryingly, support for paramilitary violence in mainly republican nationalist communities is a result of the PSNI failing to deliver a community oriented service and fill the void which was once the domain of those paramilitaries.

I suppose on a more general level, there also needs to be a fundamental rethink about the way in which PSNI performance is measured and managed as part of our normal landscape. Under the current regime of the Policing Board, any commanders I have spoken no longer feel in charge or control of their areas because of the centralised targets which have eroded the delivery of a policing service which meets the needs of local populations, with officers generally of the opinion that much of their work is reduced to meaningless target chasing. The talk down which has been termed 'bean counting culture,' is strangling certainly the necessary autonomy required to deliver locally tailored policing services. And that is with policing seemingly anything other than community led at the minute as communities will tell you, is it any wonder that the police officers and even DPP members actually laugh in the face of the relevance of Policing Board targets to local community need. In this regard, policing with the community must be about an organisational ethos which is prepared, I think, to throw off this short term managerialist culture which was brought in under Hugh Orde and really look towards the long term benefits of working with the grain of community need, something which the new Chief Constable needs to consider carefully in terms of what or who he wishes his officers to be accountable to.

To conclude on the future vision of policing with the community. It is clear that as part of the changes within PSNI and their efforts at, I suppose, winning the hearts and minds of the community, the PSNI have, and to coin Dennis Bradley at the 'Policing: The Future' conference two years ago, the PSNI have come out of the bunkers and on to the streets. However, institutional inertia around policing with the community has meant that while significant reforms to the PSNI as an organisation have been made,

more clarity and effort is still required to engender genuine policing change in our post Patten era.

Going back to David Bailey of the Oversight Commission, he said that Patten had essentially wrestled 30 years of monopoly on policing from the State and the police and have given it back to the people of Northern Ireland. As I see it, there is little point in giving policing back to the people if policing with the community provides no clear means of shaping the police around the people. As aptly remarked by a member of a mediation network in Northern Ireland, the fundamental core to the philosophy of policing with the community is the police and the community working in genuine partnership. That is still the shock for people in the country. In this regard, policing is still undoubtedly bigger than the police.

Very finally, in terms of the way forward for policing with the community, I think it is time to end this continual reinvention of policy as part of, I suppose, vertical changes within the PSNI as an organisation and focus upon the horizontal changes, if you like, at the community level, which are still needed to locate the PSNI as part of civil society and not just a police service within it.

It was ten years ago in 1999 that Maurice Hayes spoke at the seminal CAJ conference 'The Patten Commission, The Way Forward for Policing in Northern Ireland,' and it was here that he said community policing was something of a holy grail for policing, not just Northern Ireland but for police services all around the world. But I suppose to sum things up, as simply stated to me by a DPP member, community policing is about starting to think about policing more broadly in society. Look at its context as opposed to looking at community policing as just four officers walking up and down the Falls Road. That is not policing, that is only patrolling and that is not community policing. In this regard the holy grail of PSNI working more closely with the community as a whole is only at the beginning of a long journey along which many bridges still have been to be crossed. Thank you.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS: QUESTION & ANSWER

MIKE RITCHIE

Thank you very much, John, for that look at community policing. We are now going to, without further ado, throw the mics on the floor and see who picks them up and takes this discussion forward. Anybody want to offer comments, ask questions?

ANDREW IRVINE, Belfast City Centre Manager & Chairman of the Ireland Region of the Association of Town Centre Management

I want to agree with the last speaker in one respect and take issue with him on another. The bean counting experience, I have been in the press recently over the 9,000 traffic offences a week in Castle Junction and I have to say when it comes to trying to deal with that I have met, even though we worked very, very closely with Chief Inspector Murdie and indeed the city centre beat team works out of City Centre Management, so we truly are partnerships with you but I have to say that is one where I have met the frustration of our needs being met purely with the response of: "Well I am sorry but our priorities don't match up and therefore there is no resolution." So I agree with you on that one and how we actually deal with the needs of a neighbourhood compared to police targets is an issue to overcome.

The issue I want to take with you, and this is purely a personal one, is the thought in any way to allude that the PSNI were in some way responsible for the dissident threat was a much unfortunate remark and I take issue with that.

ALAN WARDLE, Independent member, North Belfast DPP

Just first of all I suppose I would like to commend Nigel for his parting comments about the nature of true partnership with policing in the community, there is a joint responsibility of communities to be involved